

DICTATORS, DEMOCRACY, AND LATIN AMERICAN JEWRY

Some Political Paradoxes of Our Hemisphere

BENNO WEISER

AT THE height of the excitement over Soviet anti-Semitism, a South American delegate to the UN said to me, "You Jews are really unlucky. First, Hitler persecuted you. Then Stalin. And now to top it off, your new savior has arisen in the person of Generalissimo Trujillo."

While temporary leader of his country's delegation to the UN, the Dominican Republic's strong man had, in February 1953, come out strongly against Soviet anti-Semitism, demanding UN action against it, and offering shelter to up to 25,000 Jews from countries behind the Iron Curtain.

Nor was Trujillo the only Latin American dictator to take this stand. On January 28, 1953, Argentina's General Juan Domingo Perón again declared his opposition to anti-Semitism, at home as well as abroad. He added that the only solution of the problem was to strengthen Israel, and promised to do his share in this. And this wasn't all. He

MANY of the cherished political generalizations that we learned in the 30's have shown their inadequacy on more than one score in recent years. Here BENNO WEISER demonstrates how they fail when applied to present-day Latin America, where "democracy" and "dictatorship" do not mean what minds oriented to Europe might assume they do—especially with reference to the Jews—or at least not without considerable revision. Mr. Weiser, though born in Europe, is a veteran of Latin American affairs and knows Latin America at first hand. After his departure from Vienna, at whose university he completed his medical studies before the *Anschluss*, he lived in Ecuador where he won a continent-wide reputation as a newspaper columnist. Now thirty-nine years old, he is on the staff of the Jewish Agency in New York. Mr. Weiser last appeared in these pages in March 1949 with a discussion of how the movie *Gentleman's Agreement* was received in South America.

also announced that, though the natural haven for Jewish refugees from the East was Israel, Argentina's doors too would be open to them. A day later the Cuban dictator, General Fulgencio Batista, convoked his Council of Ministers, who exhorted the UN members to unite in an effort to stop the Soviet persecution of Jews. And the Cuban Foreign Office cabled an offer to Mr. Sharett to bring the matter up in the second half of the seventh UN Assembly.

Of course not only the strong men of Latin America took this stand. As early as November 1952, Dr. José Vicente Trujillo, head of Ecuador's delegation to the UN, had denounced the Prague trials in the UN Assembly. The Brazilian senate had adopted a resolution condemning Russia's anti-Semitic policy, and Arturo Olivarría, Chilean Foreign Minister, had promised that Chile would support Israel "unconditionally" should the question of Soviet anti-Semitism come up in the UN. Similar forceful statements followed from Panama, the Dominican Republic, and Uruguay at the UN Assembly. It should be noted that, with the exception of Argentina, in none of the above-mentioned countries do the Jews number more than 1.5 per cent of the population.

Latin America has shown similar feelings toward the Jewish people on previous occasions. There would have been no Partition Resolution on Palestine without the Latin American vote. Whereas the proportion of all the other votes was 20 in favor to 12 opposed, the Latin American votes went 13 to 1, which accounted for the necessary two-thirds majority and an ample margin beyond that. And since then the Latin American countries have been Israel's steadfast supporters against the many Arab attacks on her in the UN.

THIS does not mean that anti-Semitism does not exist in Latin America. Only last year, dangerous situations arose in Bolivia and Costa Rica. Junior deputies to the Ecuadorian parliament made local headlines by interspersing their maiden speeches with anti-Semitic slanders. In Chile, some fifteen Jewish families on vacation in the resort village of Zapallar were forced to leave after a siege by a mob of youngsters, who stoned the houses they were in. There were also some bombings and attempted bombings of Jewish buildings in Argentina.

But to judge the Jewish situation in Latin America from such incidents would be as wrong as to judge the Jewish situation in the United States from the Miami bombings of last year. The more than 650,000 Jews who reside in the twenty countries of Latin America enjoy—as Jews—the same freedom and prosperity as their Gentile neighbors. If they feel more insecure in one country than another, that is because the general situation, as it affects every citizen, is unstable there, rather than because of anything specially threatening to the Jew.

What evidences of anti-Semitism there are in the different countries of Latin America certainly manifest no central, ominous pattern. Until Hitler's demise, Nazi propaganda made the Jewish situation somewhat uncomfortable in some places, but that has now subsided, and although prominent Nazis have found their way to South America, they have refrained so far from anti-Semitic agitation. The struggle for the Jewish state has created hard feelings between the Jewish and the no less numerous Arab colonies of Latin America, and Arab propagandists have recently appeared in Argentina and other countries; but their publications are concerned with reducing Latin American support of Israel rather than fomenting hostility towards local Jewry.

From time to time an overzealous Catholic priest will deliver a rabble-rousing Easter sermon, but there have also been many expressions of friendship toward Jews on the part of Catholic clerics, and were it not for the periodic agitation about the status of

Jerusalem, there would be hardly any unfriendly mention of Jews in the specifically Catholic press. In general, what anti-Semitism exists in Latin America would seem to be just another facet of an underlying xenophobia which is as prevalent in Latin America as is its opposite, hospitality and friendliness toward strangers.

IMMIGRATION is another story. With a few exceptions, the doors of Latin America are now closed to Jewish immigration. The few Jews that get in are either close relatives of long-established residents and/or have to buy their way in with fees to lawyers that do not go to the lawyers alone. Some countries, such as Peru, will not even grant a visitor's visa to a Jew unless he is fortunate enough to be an American citizen. Ecuador has the best record in this respect. The doors of Argentina, too, are open, but by no means as wide as one would suppose from Perón's above-mentioned statement.

These difficulties are partly an aftermath of the rush of refugees immediately before and during World War II, when Jewish immigration to certain countries was converted into a racket. That racket was finally stopped by indignant governments, to the disappointment of bribe-hungry consuls—but also of Jews who had to leave Europe or else perish and thus were ready to submit to extortion. Conditions have changed in the meantime, but some people have not yet become accustomed to the idea of giving away for nothing what had produced handsome profits in the past.

But there are other and deeper reasons for the present exclusion of Jewish immigrants. Most Latin American countries have been dreaming for years of a flood of immigrant farmers to settle their empty spaces. Although they have all benefited from Jewish immigration, which brought trained specialists, new industries, and businessmen who contributed toward raising the standard of living, the Latin American statesman still identifies Jewish immigration with its most visible part, the city-dwelling storekeeper, and feels disappointed in his original dream of

the pioneering farmer. Other immigrants may be equally disappointing, but the Jewish immigrant is more conspicuous.

In addition, Jews have recently come to be regarded as unassimilable in Latin America. Before Hitler, assimilation proceeded at a rapid pace. Linguistic adaptation presented no problem at all to the Sephardim, and was remarkably easy for some of the East European Jews, especially those from Rumania. A shortage of Jewish women made intermarriage or mixed extra-marital relations, usually legalized in the end, rather frequent. It was Hitlerism, the new immigration which followed it, and especially Zionism that put an end to this trend. Both the Jew and the Gentile became more conscious of Jewishness. Today it is taken for granted in Latin America that a Jew is identified by more than his religion. It is considered natural that he should have a special relation to Israel; after all, the Latin American himself has a similar bond to Spain, to which he refers as "*madre patria*"—be it the Spain of the kings, the Republic, or Franco. (Once, when addressing a Jewish meeting in Buenos Aires, Perón referred to Israel's envoy, Jacob Tsur, as "your minister," and one can be sure he was not being sarcastic.) But if the Jew's new nationalism is accepted as natural, it is all the more felt to make him unassimilable to Latin nationalism.

Another factor to reverse the tide of assimilation has been the disappearance of counter-attractions to Jewish nationalism. Latin American democracy is going through a serious illness, and the young Jewish intellectual who might formerly have been drawn into the politics of the larger society can hardly find inviting today the prospect of becoming a rubber stamp in a puppet parliament.

Venezuela's exiled democratic ex-president, Romulo Betancourt, put it to me this way a year ago: "We are a young nation with an underdeveloped nationalism. We need immigrants who integrate quickly, and not only after generations." He confessed ruefully that under the short-lived regime of his Accion Democratica party, Venezuela

had discriminated against Jewish immigrants. But although he regretted the "ridiculous" way in which his immigration policy was used to bar even Jewish visitors as well as immigrants, he defended the policy itself. "Look at me," he said, indicating his pigmented skin, "can I be a racist? I admire the Jewish people. In my proclamations to the Venezuelan underground I ask my followers frequently to inspire themselves with the patience and endurance with which Jews fought and achieved their statehood. If there were a question of saving human lives, I would open the gates of Venezuela to as many Jews as wanted to come. But I still think we do not need a single fur shop more in our subtropical Caracas, and have troubles enough in keeping our rural population from moving to the cities."

ASIDE, however, from the question of immigration, the position of Jews in Latin America remains good. And, to return to the seeming paradox with which we began, there is perhaps less trouble for Jews where strong-arm governments are installed than in the more democratic countries. This can be explained in part by the fact that dictatorial government frowns on any political agitation that does not serve its own ends, and a government-controlled press offers less room to anti-Semitic journalism than does a free press. When President Ulate of Costa Rica was questioned about the anti-Semitic campaign being mounted in his country—generally considered the most democratic north of Uruguay—by an alliance of native businessmen and some of their Arab and Spanish colleagues, he implied that freedom of speech included the right to express anti-Semitic sentiment. Although the campaign has subsided in Costa Rica since then, and will certainly not begin again under liberal President José Figueres' regime, the fact remains that Jews are far more comfortable in neighboring Nicaragua, which is governed by one of the shrewdest and perhaps most broad-minded of all dictators south of Mexico—Anastasio Somoza.

In Uruguay, Latin America's most ad-

vanced and democratic country, one province imposed an extra tax last year on Jewish funerals that was fifty times higher than the tax on other funerals, and, in spite of protests by institutions and newspapers, it is still in force as these lines are being written. (The literal wording of the tax law is "funerals in private cemeteries"—but the only private cemetery in the province happens to be Jewish.)

THE many manifestations of sympathy, friendship, and even generosity extended to Jewish communities and to Israel (which in Latin America is considered these communities' normal extension) by some Latin American dictators can by no means be judged altogether opportunistic or insincere. Generalissimo Trujillo's latest offer was preceded by a similar offer at the Evian Conference in 1938 (his, sadly enough, was the only offer of the kind at that time). He was then ready to admit 100,000 Jewish settlers, and it was certainly not his fault that only about 1,000 took advantage of his invitation. When I visited the Dominican Republic last year, I found a mere 200 Jews left on the idyllic little bay of Sosua, which the Generalissimo had given freely to the DORSA, a subsidiary of the Joint Distribution Committee. The other Jewish settlers had left because the emergency that had made farmers out of city-dwellers and professionals had passed. But every one of those settlers who remained had nothing but praise for the generosity of the Dominican government.

I have heard much speculation about Trujillo's motives. It is said that he wanted to increase the proportion of whites in his partly Negro country. Many of the leading families of the Dominican Republic claim Marrano ancestry, and this, too, might explain Trujillo's sympathy with the Jews. Others express the opinion that Latin American strong men think that by being nice to Jews they will flatter the United States. True, the myth, spread by Nazi propaganda, that the United States and "international Jewry" are one, and that Roosevelt was and

Truman is Jewish, is widely believed in Latin America, but this would obviously not explain Perón's friendliness, for he has seldom tried to court American favor.

Perón's first statement on Jews and Zionism, in 1945, could have been interpreted as demagogic because at that very time the walls of Buenos Aires were covered with slogans reading *Long Live Perón, Death to the Jews!* Nevertheless, he has since then backed up what he said, and repudiated the *nacionalistas* who put up those signs. Today there can be no doubt that Perón had little to do even then with the anti-Semitic activity of this extremist fringe among his supporters; victims of wishful thinking, the latter soon lost whatever political importance they had had.

And Perón's record has remained clear on the Jewish question. Manifestations of anti-Semitism have declined in Argentina as the official line has become more explicit. A bill outlawing racial discrimination was passed. The status of thousands of Jewish immigrants who had smuggled themselves into the country was legalized, and some thirty prominent Jewish intellectuals stranded in France were admitted.

Of course, General Perón has his own way of dealing with Jewish matters, and he has made his hand-picked *Organizacion Israelita Argentina* the channel through which most Jewish-Argentinian relations and even a part of Israeli-Argentinian relations have to pass. Yet even the absence of Jewish political support has not changed his policy. Perón knew very well that he was elected president in 1945 without the Jewish vote, and even when, after years of being wooed by the government, the predominantly Jewish districts of Buenos Aires in the last elections defeated a Peronista candidate, who happened to be a Jew, and gave the opposition party's candidate a majority, Perón still showed no resentment.

If the Perón government's attitude towards domestic Jewry can be considered friendly, its attitude towards the State of Israel has to be called downright benevolent. Although it is typical of the traditional Ar-

gentinian tendency towards neutrality that this benevolence does not make itself felt markedly in the UN, where a vote for Israel generally means a vote against the Arab nations, the Israel-Argentina commercial treaty probably constitutes the most favorable that the Jewish state has yet concluded with any government.

An observer unfamiliar with the Argentinian tradition of neutrality might be puzzled to see that Argentina nevertheless remains, like Franco's Spain, a principal refuge for prominent or technically gifted Nazi exiles. But it must be said that this indicates no feeling against Jews.

To complete our survey: Peru's Jews have not felt for many years as comfortable as under the present military dictatorship, and Venezuelan Jewry has no complaints against the military regime which now, after a short interlude of democracy, once more controls their country. Colombia under Laureano Gomez—recently ousted by military coup—had become Latin America's chief theater of fratricide and subterranean civil war, but the Gomez government's attitude toward its Jewish subjects remained correct, whereas Protestants complained about persecution. Nicaragua's dictator, Anastasio Somoza, has Jewish intimates, and has been extremely helpful to Israel. And Cuba's Fulgencio Batista maintains that friendly attitude toward his country's Jewish community which has become a well-established tradition on that island.

BEFORE trying to explain the phenomenon of the Latin American strong man's friendliness to the Jews it becomes necessary to dwell on the phenomenon of the Latin American dictatorship itself. Of course, one must keep away from generalizations in speaking of twenty independent states. Nevertheless, the following factors apply more or less from the Rio Grande to the Plata: there was first the native Indian society, organized in monarchic and tribal systems centering around the king and the *cacique*. To this aboriginal *Fuehrerprinzip* another one was added by the *conquista*, the conquest by ab-

solutist and hierarchical Spain. The colonial feudal system made the *latifundista*, the big landowner, unlimited boss over his slaves, servants, and laborers. The Catholic Church, the European-stock oligarchy, and the foreign mercantile exploiters favored, for different reasons, the concentration of power in a few hands. Even after the arrival of democracy, illiteracy automatically excluded large parts of the population in many countries from participating in any political activity. And then there were the armies, which, starting as armies of liberation against foreign rule, developed their power-hungry generals and their attitude of the superiority of the military man over the civil administrator, of the *macho*, the male with guts, over the intellectual. All these factors together contributed to *caudillismo*, the *caudillo* being at the same time a military strong man, a daring hero, an ideological guide—however primitive—and, at times, even a fatherly figure.

DEMOCRACY, which has had its ups and downs in Latin America, is down again today. During World War II, the term dictator did not sound good, and an absolutist regime found it necessary to consider what the repercussions would be in the United States if an exiled opponent called it Nazi or fascist. Since 1945 democracy has become weaker, and not only in Latin America. Franco's regime in Spain has been almost universally accepted as here to stay. Nazis have become *salonfaehig*. The fight against Communism has given new life to elements who may be dangerous to democracy but whose anti-Communism is unquestioned. And the very fact that a general, however different from the kind of generals Latin America usually produces, has become President of the United States, serves to encourage the Latin American military strong man.

But, also, the differences between democracies and dictatorships have narrowed as the former have become less liberal and the latter less oppressive. Dictatorial government is not quite in the same disrepute as a few years ago, and most dictators can now get

along with their neighbors and, most important of all, with the United States.

At the Pan American Conference in Montevideo in 1933, the American government, which under Roosevelt was abandoning the "big stick" policy in Latin America for the "good neighbor" one, accepted the principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of the Latin American states. In 1945, in the same city of Montevideo, an exiled leader of the Argentinian Radical party told me that if the United States did not do "something," a "catastrophe" would occur in Argentina. Today we often find the very same people who used to regard American intervention in their countries' affairs as "Yankee imperialism" looking toward "the great democracy of the North" for help against their enemies at home. And for its part, the State Department, which was formerly reluctant to recognize *de facto* governments, has apparently tired of trying to cope with an unceasing avalanche of military coups and revolutions, and now automatically establishes relations with whatever government is capable of maintaining law and order (or, let us say, just order). Had it not pursued this policy, it would have had to close, at one time or another in recent years, more than half the American embassies in the Hemisphere.

Because democracy in Latin America so often serves only a wealthy minority, adherence to it can be claimed even by those who fight a democratically established regime. During the summer of 1952 I was chatting with Ecuador's eternal revolutionary, Carlos Guevara Moreno, then mayor of Guayaquil—and now in exile—and I asked him about his political theories. He answered: "Do you want to know whether I am a democrat? It depends on what you call democracy. You know that two million of our three million inhabitants are Indians and illiterate and that only about three hundred thousand people participate in elections; that mostly those who have enough time or money to campaign have a chance to be elected; that directly or indirectly the parliamentary majority will always represent the interests of

the feudal class to which they belong. Who speaks for the millions who are not represented and who constitute the majority of the nation? I confess that I would not be interested in a constitutional government where a congress elected by a minority could block all the changes that are in the interest of the majority. If democracy means only adherence to certain formal procedures, you can have it. If it means to have at heart the interests of the majority, I believe I deserve the title of democrat."

The differences between the dictator and the democratic statesman in Latin America are not so clearly defined as one would suppose. Cuba's Batista, who became dictator last year by a *coup d'état*, had been a constitutional president in 1940. Ecuador's humanitarian, ascetic, and incorruptible president, José María Velasco Ibarra, assumed absolute powers on two occasions after having been duly elected, was overthrown twice, and then, returning from an exile of several years, won a third election by an overwhelming majority.* Brazil's Getulio Vargas and Chile's Carlos Ibañez del Campo won popular elections in spite of the fact that they had headed dictatorial regimes in the past.

Moreover, whether a Latin American ruler is a dictator or a democrat is less frequently a question of doctrine than of temperament or circumstances. In 1945, when I met Bolivia's Dr. Victor Paz Estenssoro, then Minister of Finance and the ideological backbone of the dictatorial Villaroel regime (which came to an end with Villaroel's murder a year later), I was only too pre-

*President Velasco Ibarra is probably one of the most extraordinary friends the Jewish people have ever had. Before firing a Director of Immigration in 1944 who had tried to strictly enforce Ecuador's immigration regulations, which compel immigrants to go into either industry or agriculture, he lectured him in the presence of a Jewish community leader: "Our regulations are for immigrants. But the Jews in our midst are not immigrants but refugees. I have tasted what exile means, and if they had forced me to become an industrialist or a peasant in Chile, I would have starved long ago. There will be only one law for the Jews in this country as long as I am president—the law of humanity."

pared to dislike a man who was so prominent in a hated regime. What I found was an earnest, clever, hard-working intellectual with whom I could not but feel sympathetic. Seven years later this same man, elected *in absentia* president of his country, returned from exile on the crest of a bloody revolution (precipitated by the unwillingness of the outvoted regime to surrender power to him) as a symbol of democracy and the fulfilment of the genuine desires of the majority of Bolivians.

WHATEVER the reasons, the history of the Latin American states is still, more than that of other countries, the history of individuals rather than of masses and ideologies. The opinion that one clear head can achieve more than many muddled or even many clear ones of different opinions has many partisans. The craving of the masses for a strong man is sensed by the democratic leaders and troubles the more sensitive among them.*

There is José Figueres of Costa Rica, who is at present Central America's outstanding democratic leader. After the annulment of the election of Otilio Ulate by President Picado in 1948, Figueres, a farmer-industrialist, became a soldier-statesman; collecting a handful of followers at his mountain hacienda and gathering others as he went, he overthrew Picado's government forces in a six weeks' civil war. At that moment the expected thing would have been for Figueres to grab all the power for himself. But after establishing law and order, and compensating the victims of the civil war, which had cost about 1,200 lives, he handed the government over to the elected President Otilio Ulate. During the next two years he himself campaigned patiently—and legal-

ly—for the presidency, which he won in the most recent election.

I accompanied Figueres on one of his electioneering tours, and I saw more vividly than ever before the dilemma of the democratic leader in a politically immature society: "You see," he said to me, "they want me to be their *caudillo*, whereas I just want to be their educator."

At a typical rally, in the movie theater of the village of Valverde Vega, the first rows were occupied by children, some of them under school age, with the adults behind them. And most of the latter were barefoot, sunburnt peasants who, although they were not the typical Indian *peones* of other Latin American countries, since Costa Rica is predominantly white, nevertheless presented an air of illiteracy. First came a succession of speakers making the typical campaign speeches of every era and every place. At the end of every sentence each speaker would raise his voice to give the cue for applause. A sentence that did not draw applause was obviously a failure, but on such occasions an elegant and otherwise well-mannered young man who traveled with us all the way, and had been introduced to me as a "shouting specialist," would produce a stentorian "Viva don Pepe Figueres!" and the crowd would answer with an amen-like "Viva!"

While waiting for Mr. Figueres' speech, I wondered how he could possibly bring the message of democracy to an audience so patently suited for demagoguery. He spoke quickly and fluently without raising his voice at the end of every sentence, thus shutting off applause. His listeners finally stopped listening for cues and holding their hands ready to clap, and I noticed that they then began to make a real effort to follow him as he explained the problems of their country. One saw him deliberately resisting temptations to which other men would have succumbed—and this was a man who, as a leader in revolution and war, had already given more than one proof of his capacity for rousing oratory. He is a unique leader for a backward country.

*One might point out, in connection with this matter of popular attitudes, that a corrupt democracy generally *looks* more corrupt than a corrupt dictatorship. In the absence of a free press and the presence of a secret police, a dictator can enrich himself without having to buy anybody's silence. In a corrupt democracy one has to bribe many politicians and newspapermen in order to escape unfavorable publicity.

OBVIOUSLY, it is a mistake to judge Latin American politics by American standards. While the average American politician starts his career as a district attorney or candidate for a state legislature, his Latin American counterpart starts it generally by being thrown into jail for a newspaper article or an incendiary speech at his university. While the American politician is campaigning for Congress, his Latin American equivalent is spending a few years in exile, frequently in poverty. In most cases he starts out as an idealist and reformer, but the "seven lean years" of exile tend to weaken his immunity to the temptations of the "fat years" that come if and when he wins power. If he manages to preserve his personal integrity, he will hardly be able to refuse favors to friends and supporters who stood by his side in bygone days. Perhaps he will be apprehensive of the day when he has to hand over the government to a successor who now opposes him with the same violence as he opposed his predecessor. He might try to secure the election of a friend who will collaborate with him, and he may pervert the administrative machinery to this end. Or he might be frightened into trying to perpetuate himself in power—not always because he desires power itself so much, but because he does not know how to get out of it.

It would be a still greater mistake to judge Latin American politics by European standards, and borrow labels from recent European history to describe Latin American strong men. *Caciquismo* and *caudillismo* are older than Fascism and Nazism. Of course, all dictators have something in common, and there was a psychological basis for the admiration that Hitler and Mussolini (but not their ideologies) elicited from some of the dictators of Latin America. But there were other dictators who loathed the Duce and the Fuehrer, and would have been sincerely shocked by any comparison with them.

In any case, it is perhaps wrong to assume that any and every dictatorship, even a European-style fascist one, has necessarily to be anti-Semitic. Italian Fascism would not have turned against the Jews without Nazi

pressure, and Franco Spain's record on the Jewish question is not at all bad. As for the Nazis and the Stalinist Communists, historical circumstances, as much as the type of government as such, explain their anti-Semitism. After all, the Nazis' use of the Jewish question was not an opportunistic device but the consequence of a deeply rooted German anti-Semitism which was made the main pillar of Nazi ideology. Similarly, Stalinist anti-Semitism is not an improvisation of Red totalitarianism, but is solidly steeped in Russian national traditions.

There exists no specific Latin American anti-Semitic ideology. This applies to the democratic as well as to the other countries. Latin American strong men either do without scapegoats or look for them abroad in "Yankee imperialism," "Wall Street," "Communism," or the foreign press. Dictators may have a tendency to despise weak minorities, but the Jews have recently stopped belonging to this category. Jewish terrorism against the British in Palestine and the subsequent feats of the Israeli army have aroused profound admiration in Latin America, especially in military circles. Furthermore, unlike Hitler, the Latin American dictator is satisfied if a citizen does not interfere with him, and he does not go out of his way to create enemies.

AND what about the Jewish attitude toward all this?

In countries with new and small Jewish communities that have not yet developed roots and still live in a certain isolation, Jews will often be grateful to a regime that treats them with fairness and compassion—all the more since as newcomers they will have had little contact with those who fight against that regime in the name of freedom and democracy. Thus in the Dominican Republic I found among Jews a certain naive lack of comprehension of the attacks on the Trujillo regime made abroad.

The situation is different in countries with larger and older Jewish communities, where Jews participate in life at large and have closer relations with Gentile neighbors. In spite of all Perón's wooing, Argentinian Jew-

ry is certainly not for him, as the last elections have proven. They might consider his benevolence towards them a redeeming feature, and have no complaints as Jews, but as Argentinian citizens they think back nostalgically to the days of freedom.

But the Jews of Argentina are not so foolish as to believe that the overthrow of Perón would usher in paradise. For it is hardly conceivable that his overthrow would be achieved by democratic forces; it is more likely that it would be the work of the extreme nationalist elements in the army and of the Nazi-like Alianza Nacionalista. This possibility probably accounts for the rather passive role of Argentina's Jewry at the present time.

The Jewish question is, of course, only one of the problems a Jewish citizen faces. Perhaps he feels that a certain amount of "physiological" or "instinctive" anti-Semitism is more natural and safer than the artificial suppression of anti-Semitism by dictatorial

decree. In the final analysis, I think the Uruguayan Jew lives with more peace of mind than his Argentinian neighbor.

However, despotism is still despotism, with or without discrimination against Jews. Nazism would still have been despicable even if it had not touched the hair of a single Jew. We have argued that it is wrong to judge all Latin American dictators by the same standards and to condemn them wholesale. At the same time, to look at Latin America's political tragedy only through the perspective of the attitude different regimes take toward the Jew would place us in the ridiculous position of the student in the famous story about the elephant and the Jewish problem. A partisan of democracy can only view with sadness its present plight in so many of the countries of Latin America. Whatever relief he may feel at the fact that Jews, who have suffered all over the world and under all pretexts, are not the victims this time, the sadness remains.